Executive Summary

- Seagrass ecosystems are protected under the federal "no-net-loss" policy for wetlands and form one of the most productive plant communities on the planet, performing important ecological functions.

- Seagrass beds have been recognized as a valuable resource critical to the health and function of coastal waters. Greater awareness and public education, however, is essential for conservation of this resource.

- Tremendous losses of this habitat have occurred as a result of development within the coastal zone. Disturbances usually kill seagrasses rapidly, and recovery is often comparatively slow.

- Mitigation to compensate for destruction of existing habitat usually follows when the agent of loss and responsible party are known. Compensation assumes that ecosystems can be made to order and, in essence, trades existing functional habitat for the *promise* of replacement habitat.

- While planting seagrass is not technically complex, there is no easy way to meet the goal of maintaining or increasing seagrass acreage. Rather, the entire process of planning, planting and monitoring requires attention to detail and does not lend itself to oversimplification.

- The success rate of permit-linked mitigation projects remains low overall, but this appears to result from failures in the planning process as much as any other cause. To prevent continued loss of habitat under compensatory mitigation, decisive action must be taken by placing emphasis on improving site selection, compliance, generating desired acreage, and maintaining a true baseline.

- Seagrass planting is no longer experimental, but planting will not succeed unless managers appreciate and emphasize the extreme importance of site selection, care in planting, and incorporation of plant demography into the planning and planting processes.

- Seagrass beds can be restored, but preservation is the most cost-effective course of action to sustain seagrass resources. Although techniques and protocols exist that produce persistent seagrass beds, they are often applied inconsistently, which has resulted in large-scale failures.

- A logical and ecologically defensible goal is to attain replacement of the lost seagrass species with an area of bottom coverage that compensates for interim lost resource services and a comparable shoot density. Seagrass plantings that persist and generate the target acreage have been shown to quickly provide many of the functional attributes of natural beds.

- When destruction of the impact site requires planting in another location (i.e., offsite) it is often difficult to find a site elsewhere with suitable biological and physical parameters required for seagrass growth and persistence.

- As more information is made available to managers regarding the function of seagrass ecosystems and the difficulties involved in mitigating for their loss, fewer permitted impacts are occurring with more emphasis placed on impact avoidance and minimization.